Defense: Why Would God Kill His Only Son? Memory Verse: John 3:16

June 15th, 2025 Scripture Reading: James 2:8-13

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Today we are continuing our study along the lines of apologetics. We have been tackling some of the main criticisms or questions people have about Christianity. What sort of answer can we provide? What are the reasons we have for the things we believe? We do not want to be caught unawares by a legitimate question. We cannot respond by simply saying, “I was raised in the faith” or “I just choose to believe.” These questions we have been looking at are legitimate questions and they deserve legitimate answers.

 This question we raise today is a question Christians need to ask for the sake of their own faith. Why would God kill his only Son? Or to put it another, less extreme way; Why did Jesus have to die? I remember asking this question as a child growing up in a Christian home with loving and faithful parents. It seemed like a very crucial question…like it involved the point to the whole story. The whole gospel is contained in this question. And I wondered why I have never had it explained to me. But the truth is, the answer to this question, was always being explained to me. In some ways it takes a lifetime to answer. It is not so easy to sum up in a simplified way and still do justice to the event of Jesus on the cross. Writer Flannery O’Connor was once asked to summarize one of her stories, to put it in a nutshell. She was taken aback by the idea. If a nutshell would have sufficed, she said, then she would not have had to write out the story. The same is true with the story of the gospel. God has worked through history and put together the story of Jesus in a very careful and purposeful way. When it comes to the gospel, we can’t just ignore the details or the story arc or even the beginning…the Old Testament. Genesis is a part of the gospel story. We can’t pretend that a nutshell will suffice. There is just more to it than that.

 But this question, “Why would God kill his only son?” signals to us that whoever might be asking has some familiarity with the story **[SLIDE 2]**. They might have misunderstood it and they might be looking at it through a faulty lens, but they are acknowledging the event of the crucifixion. They are acknowledging that Jesus died, and that God had something to do with it. And, we must all ask, why? Why is the gospel told in this way?

 We must admit, the cross is ugly. It’s offensive and so extreme. The Passion, a movie about the crucifixion had to be rated R due to the brutal violence presented in the film. Why would God be involved with something so bloody and violent? Many people, even some church leaders and pastors, do not want to sit in the shadow of the cross. It is too uncomfortable…it seems too angry and much too judgmental. Instead, we should focus on the God of love. We should focus on forgiveness and joy and less on the bloody mess of the cross. Some see the story as an example of “divine child abuse.” That would be an example of one of those faulty lenses I mentioned earlier. But church, we need to be clear, **[SLIDE 3]** *the cross is the center of Christianity.* It represents the very thing Christ came to do on this earth. He came to die*. We dare not look away.*

 Why would God kill his only son? Of course, scripture answers this question for us, but as I said, we cannot reduce it all down in a nutshell. But we can highlight things that the bible highlights. It’s very possible that someone asking this question about Jesus’ death might be somewhat familiar John 3:16. **[SLIDE 4]** It is a flagship verse for a reason. And it explains the situation in quite different terms: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life.” So John begins with love **[SLIDE 5]**. God is love and he expresses that love to the world, not by *killing* his only Son, but by **[SLIDE 6]***giving* his only Son. There is in this giving, the notion of a gift being presented. And John also explains to us what lies in store for the end result: **[SLIDE 7]** eternal life. All of this; God’s love and the gift of his Son results in the possibility of eternal life. So that is the nutshell. It does not explain the details very well, but what we need to do now is take a look at those details while keeping our eyes on the overall scope of the story. The details of the gospel must be understood in light of God’s love and God’s gift of his Son and in light of eternal life.

 As I mentioned, even the beginning is important. In the beginning **[SLIDE 8]** Gid created… This gospel makes no sense if the God of love is not the Creator of the universe. It makes no sense if we as humans are not made in his image. This gospel story is also a response to the fall of man. We all have broken God’s command and now live separated from this God of love. So all these parts of the Bible need to be in place before we can jump to Jesus on the cross and make sense of it. God is love but with the fall, now there is sin **[SLIDE 9]**. If God loves us, then he wants what is best for us. Not what we think is best for us, but what actually is best. If God is love, then he wants to be with us. Love is always relational. And sin, wrongdoing, God knows, is bad for us…it separates us from him and so this God of love hates sin. This God of love hates that which would hurt us or impair us or hold us back or keep us deceived or blinded. So, our God of love must respond. He must rescue those he loves. But how?

**[SLIDE 10]**Growing up, I was the oldest child; the only boy with four younger sisters. One day, my parents came to me quite angrily and demanded to know what had happened. I was truly clueless as to what they meant, so they brought me over to the big, beautiful picture window located in the living room and pointed to the **[SLIDE 11]** sprawling crack that ran from top to bottom. As the oldest, I was always on the hook for such developments that occurred in our home but this time I truly was innocent. I had no idea what had happened. I just had to plead my case. My parents were slow to believe me, but after some further investigation, a fairly large rock **[SLIDE 12]** was found under the living room couch, the very weapon used in the crime. It turns out, my then three-year old little sister had a very powerful throwing arm and a very low amount of common sense. She threw the rock and broke the window. So what you have here is a small child causing destruction. Now what were my parents to do? The window had to be replaced. Who was going to pay for it? Certainly not my three year old sister. My folks could not very well tell the repair company that their daughter was at fault and they should not have to be charged. No, the cost of the damage would land squarely on my parents. They would have to foot the bill out of their own pockets.

 This is just a simple example, but it helps us see **[SLIDE 13]** the effects of sin. Our sin inflicts damage. Of course, this damage goes way beyond the bounds of financial solutions. We inflict emotional damage, spiritual damage, physical and psychological damage. Our sin destroys relationships and hurts people. Our sin hurts our own selves. There is no price that can cover the cost of what we have done. The only answer for the rocks we throw is death. Romans 6:23, another highlight; the wages of sin is death. That is what offense against a holy God entails. We must die. That is the only price that can be paid. It seems extreme. Can’t God just forgive? Surely my parents are not going to threaten my sister’s life because she did something wrong and caused damage. They will forgive her and allow her to live another day to try again. But think about what forgiveness entails for my parents in this situation. They cannot simply say, “We forgive you for breaking the window.” They must also actually pay for the damage done.

 ((God cannot just forgive, because **[SLIDE 14]** *forgiveness always involves payment.* God is love and because he is love he cannot overlook, ignore, or dismiss sin. **[SLIDE 15]** Love wants to restore. Love wants to fix what has been broken. Love is willing to pay the price. If my parents were unloving, if they were only ever obsessed with justice, then they potentially could have kept a file **[SLIDE 16]** on each of their children and, throughout the years, whenever one of us kids incurred some sort of cost that had to be covered, they could keep track of each expense and file it away. Then, once we reached adulthood, good old mom and dad could turn that file over to us and demand that we pay up. “Here is a complete record of what you have cost us over the last 18 years. Now you owe us.” Can you imagine what the dollar amount on that bill would be? Can you imagine setting your kids up with such debt? I would never be able to repay it. I would never be able to get out from under that debt that I created. And yet **[SLIDE 17]** parents do not do that to their kids. They cover the cost; they take it upon themselves.))

 But financial coverage is one thing, sin **[SLIDE 18]** against a holy God is another. And the payment required is not a dollar amount, it is our very lives. As I mentioned earlier, the cross to many people seems to be such an extreme measure. Why is God so over the top? But we only think this way because we have lost sight of the enormity of our sin. Sin is an extreme offense, an extreme evil. It’s an extreme problem that calls for an extreme solution.

 **[SLIDE 19]** But God so loved the world, that is, sinners. We are engaged in extreme behavior that brings about extreme amounts of damage. He loved us so much that he sent his only Son into our brokenness, into our selfishness, into our extreme mess. And there is another important detail here in the fact that Jesus the Son and God the Father are One. Jesus notes this in John 10:30. While they are separate in personhood, they are unified in their nature. And so, as God sends his only Son, we can rightly say that he sends himself. In Christ, God enters our sinful world.

 Now, all things being equal, what ought to happen to a sinful world when a holy God enters into it? Utter destruction. The holiness of God ought to obliterate the evil of sin. And when sin is obliterated, we would be too along with it. But that is not what happened. Why not? Because all things are not equal. God is holy and therefor perfectly just and yet he leans toward mercy. James 2:13 lets us know that, “Mercy triumphs over judgement”. Now again, the justice of God demands payment, life must be paid for the death that has been wrought by sin, but who pays that bill? Who takes on the penalty? Not me. And not you. Jesus does on the cross. He stands condemned while I stand free. Biblical scholar John Stott puts it this way, “The essence of sin is we human beings substituting ourselves for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us.” That is why at church we sing songs like *How Deep the Father’s Love*…it’s a song about his extreme love going to extreme lengths to fix the extreme problems our sin has created. Part of the lyrics say “It was my sin that held him there, until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished.” God did send his only Son, but God did not kill his only Son, I did. I did it. I am the guilty one. He died because of me. And let’s be clear: I am not a small child tossing rocks at windows because I don’t know any better. No. I am fully aware and I’m throwing rocks with intent. I am purposefully causing destruction.

 But we end where we started: with the love of God **[SLIDE 20]**. Despite what I deserve, despite my sin, my hard heart and my stubbornness, Jesus dies on my behalf, he pays my debt. But, here again, all things are not equal. The end result is not simply a bill that has been paid off. It’s not a break even situation…It is an offer of eternal life! In Christ we find forgiveness of our sins yes, but so much more. Eternal life in union with God, eternal life in relationship with this God of love who gave himself for us. Sometimes we picture salvation as Jesus pulling us out of a deep pit and standing us up on the ground again. But, again, in Christ we are more than restored. He lifts us out of the pit and keeps on lifting us and keeps on lifting us and keeps on lifting us. As citizens of Christ’s kingdom, we can confidently say that we are in this world, but we are not of this world. We are being lifted out of it. Because of Christ, we can truly live in an alternate kingdom, we can truly live with an ongoing hope and we can truly offer to the people around us a way out of the condemnation we all have earned.

 **[SLIDE 21]** The cross is extreme; a horrible, brutal story. We want to look away. We want to sanitize the details. We want to focus on something else. We want to excuse ourselves and blame God. We want to paint him as the monster. What kind of God would do such horrible things to his Only Son? What kind of God would be so extremely violent. I’ll tell you what kind of God: **[SLIDE 22]** A God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life. Amen.